

**Have you lost
someone to
suicide?**



**SUPPORT AFTER
YOUTH SUICIDE**

In loving memory of Adam Cashen

HAVE YOU LOST SOMEONE TO SUICIDE?

If you have recently lost someone to suicide you may be experiencing unimaginable pain and confusion. It's important to realize:

**It is not your fault
&
you are not alone!**

In Canada, suicide is one of the leading causes of death amongst youth aged 15-24. The Canadian Mental Health Association estimates that suicide claims the lives of more than 300 youth annually, leaving survivors like you behind to grieve.

WHAT NOW?

**Surround yourself
with loved ones
for support.**

**Don't be afraid
to ask for help!**

QUOTES

“I lost my son to suicide 6 years ago. I will always miss him and something inside of me died that day also, but in spite of this tragedy, I have choices: one of which is to find a path in my life that has meaning, through his memory.” ~ Lorraine

“Being around friends and family who knew my friend helped me because they could understand how I was feeling.” ~ David

“I used music to help me cope with my sadness.” ~ Rob

“At the time of my son’s death I drew comfort from spending time with his friends. We cried together, laughed together and shared many funny stories.” ~ Carol

“My doctor sent me to a psychologist. I’m glad I went and that my parents knew something was up. I’m still struggling but it has really helped.” ~ Morgan

*“It has been 15 years since I lost my son. Time has passed so quickly, but the memories of him will last a lifetime. His passing has given new meaning and purpose to my life, and to those lives that I have touched.”
~ George*

GIVE YOURSELF TIME TO GRIEVE

You may be faced with overwhelming waves of emotion as you try to cope with the loss of your loved one.

ANGER GUILT BLAME EXTREME SADNESS

Everyone reacts differently to loss so give yourself the time as you need to mourn your loved one's death.

**Over time the grief will
become less intense.**

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN GRIEF & DEPRESSION?

Grief is an expected and appropriate emotional response to loss. It is usually time limited and subsides gradually. Grief can consist of initial shock, feelings of loss, physical pain, a sense of emptiness and even anger and guilt. However, if these feelings persist for longer periods of time and begin to interfere with your regular daily activities you may be at risk of developing depression and should seek professional help from a counsellor or your family doctor.

START THE HEALING PROCESS

Although everyone deals with grief differently there are a number of things that many people find helpful during this time:

- ***Surround yourself with loved ones.*** Do not isolate yourself. Although you may feel the need to be alone, prolonged isolation may contribute to increased feelings of loneliness and separation.
- ***Be honest.*** It's important to realize that what has happened is real - feel free to share openly with others and don't be afraid of your thoughts and feelings.
- ***Visit a health provider.*** Sometimes it helps to talk to a professional. Counselling may be available through your family doctor, workplace, school, or religious group.
- ***Ask for help.*** If you are feeling overwhelmed at times, it's OK to ask for help from family and friends.
- ***Join a support group.*** Many communities have grief support groups, if not there are chat sites online where you can share your feelings with others who are going through the same thing.

DEALING WITH STIGMA

WHAT IS STIGMA?

Stigma is a negative label often placed on people with mental illness. Stigmas are hurtful, judgemental and not based on fact.

You may be faced with some insensitive comments as neighbours, friends, family and coworkers may not know what to say to you or how to react. Don't be afraid to talk openly about your loved one's death - this will not only help you heal but it will help people around you to understand and eventually come to terms with the loss. By sharing your story you are also helping to combat stigma associated with suicide and mental illness.

LONG TERM HEALING

Although the pain may never go away completely, you can learn to cope, and in time life will become easier as you find your new normal. Here are a few things to keep in mind that may help:

- ***Share memories.*** It helps to share memories with others, especially if you can talk to someone else who also knew him/her .
- ***Try to keep up your daily routine.*** Keeping busy and working towards resuming your regular routine is important.
- ***Take part in activities.***
- ***Exercise.*** Walking, running, yoga etc. may help to reduce the tension and stress you may be feeling.
- ***Write in a journal.*** Writing is a good way to express your feelings and it will help you get your thoughts.
- ***Rest & eat.*** Try to get 8 hours of sleep a night and eat to maintain your health.
- ***Faith.*** For some people faith and spiritual support are helpful.
- ***Finding a new hobby.*** A hobby, sport, or interest may help you to find your “new normal”

SUPPORTING A SURVIVOR

Sometimes it's difficult for those who are grieving to reach out to others. Being there to support your loved one is important. Here are a few tips to keep in mind while being supportive:

- Be patient and respect the need to grieve.
- Let them know you are there for them and ready to listen if they want to talk.
- Educate yourself about suicide in order to overcome any preconceptions you may have about suicide or any discomfort you may feel talking about the subject.
- Avoid saying, "I know how you feel" unless you've also lost someone to suicide.
- Seek out survivor support groups and offer to attend a meeting with him/her.
- Run errands or cook a meal for him/her. Small acts of kindness go a long way.

Realize that your loved one may not seem themselves for some time and may develop mood swings. These reactions are common in the grieving process. Just try to keep an open mind and be there as a friend.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Recommended readings:

- Dying to be Free. A Healing Guide for Families after a Suicide, by Beverly Cobain and Jean Larch.
- No Time to Say Goodbye, by Carla Fine.
- The Seven T's, by Judy Collins.
- Touched by Suicide, by Michael Myers, M.D.

Websites:

<http://www.leftbehindbysuicide.org>

<http://www.teenmentalhealth.org>

The Canadian Mental Health Association:

<http://www.cmha.ca>

<http://www.afsp.org>

<http://www.survivorsofsuicide.com>

<http://www.uk-sobs.org.uk>

Support Groups:

Survivors of Suicide (SOS), Halifax.
George Tomie. (902) 835-3812 after 7pm
(<http://www.sos-novascotia.com>)

The IWK Child and Adolescent
Bereavement group.

Nick Zwaagstra. (902) 470-8942

For a list of other local bereavement
support groups in the HRM
visit www.cdha.nshealth.ca

Crisis lines:

Kids Help Phone. 24 hr. (800) 668-6868
Halifax Metro Helpline. (902) 421-1188
Mental Health Mobile Crisis Team (Halifax
Regional Municipality). (888) 429-8167

The development of this material
was funded in part by:



This material is endorsed by:



Public Health
Services
CAPITAL HEALTH



CANADIAN MENTAL
HEALTH ASSOCIATION
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
POUR LA SANTÉ MENTALE

Printed 2009

Electronic copy available at

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